

SPORTS

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Playing the games of winter ... and summer

In Duxbury, tennis reigns supreme
on an amazing 91 private courts

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DUXBURY — Take a spin around Duxbury and you're sure to spot tennis courts nestled among wooded residential properties — lots and lots of home tennis courts, in fact.

There are 91 private courts in Duxbury, exceeded in the Boston suburbs only by Weston's 130, according to an informal survey.

By contrast, other tony tennis towns such as Cohasset and Hingham are somewhere in the middle of the pack, with 40 and 38 home courts respectively.

"I really hadn't thought about how many private courts we have, but I guess they tie in with the 'Duluxbury' image," Richard Finnegan, Duxbury's deputy assessor, said tongue-in-cheek.

The number of hard-surface and clay courts in the town is not a surprise, though, to Rita Welch of Duxbury, who said, "Yes, the town has 91 [home] courts and 1,001 trees." Her family has had a hard-surface court for 10 years.

Peggy Blair remembers when Duxbury was a relative wasteland when it came to private tennis courts. "When we came here in 1971, we had to fight for time on the public courts. But now they're always empty," Blair said, noting that she and her husband had their 20-year-old hard court resurfaced two years ago.

Although tennis's appeal took a nosedive in the 1980s, following explosive growth in the 1970s, the sport appears to be making a comeback, said Bruce Mahler, owner of

Boston Tennis Court Construction Co. in Hanover. His business, he added, is a big hit again, especially in places like Duxbury, Weston, and Lincoln, "where lot sizes are larger and there is a lot of discretionary income."

Homeowners with money are indeed spurring the tennis-court construction trade, added Gordy Pierce, who heads Cape & Island Tennis & Track of Pocasset, which resurfaced Brookline's Longwood Cricket Club courts for this weekend's Davis Cup matches between the United States and Australia.

"Very few people of modest means have tennis courts in their backyard," Pierce said, adding that court construction costs for asphalt and clay courts usually amount to between \$25,000 and \$45,000, with fencing. His company's largest residential project to date was a \$1 million tennis complex, complete with winding sets of stairs and a limestone balustrade, for a Chestnut Hill couple in 1997.

But it is the love of tennis, rather than showing off spending habits, that prompted them to have courts built, say Duxbury couples such as the John Boes, a Cape & Island customer.

"Our court, which is four years old, is the best investment we've ever made, in terms of something that brings fun and recreation for us and our friends," said John Boc, president of Meridian Investments of Quincy.

He plays doubles Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings from May to November, while his wife, Elaine, plays doubles weekdays on



GLOBE PHOTO / BETHANY VERSOY

Duxbury's John and Elaine Boc play tennis on their court from May to November for fun and recreation.

their cushioned hard court, which is designed to be much like a slow clay court.

"We didn't have lights put in because, if we had, we would have been faced with telling some of our friends at 2 in the morning that the match was over," he said with a knowing laugh.

On his 50th birthday, friends presented him with a high tennis umpire's chair. Not that there ever has been a problem with line calls being made in his and his partner, Elaine's, favor, Boc said.

But some time ago, Elaine recalled, there was one very unusual interruption of play.

"During a critical point, one of my husband's opponents suddenly pointed to the sky and said, 'Wow, that must be a pterodactyl!' Of course, it wasn't the extinct wide-winged creature - it was most likely a heron. Those friends, though, are

still known as the pterodactyl team."

The Bocs and others turn over their courts a couple of times a season to townwide tournaments benefiting research into cerebral palsy and other charitable causes.

"I've played in Duxbury tournaments, and there's nothing like playing on private courts," said Richard Morse of Hingham, a ranked senior player in New England and a committee member of the United States Tennis Association-New England.

The Welches' court is used mostly for fund-raisers and by her children and grandchildren, Rita Welch said. "There's always a good variety of players for us older folks to watch."

There will be a diversity of players on a court that the Peter Maguires recently had built on land adjoining their new home.

"We had an Astroturf-type court ripped out and replaced by a multi-

purpose court that can also be used by our two sons and their friends for roller blading and basketball," Susan Maguire said.

Since her youngsters aren't yet tennis addicts, it remains to be seen how much tennis will be played, she said, adding, "But it will be a good option to offer."

She and her husband still find time for doubles play with friends on their court while also pursuing golf, Peggy Blair said. "We think we have the best of both worlds."

But the best of all possible worlds is being able to play tennis outdoors well into the fall and, sometimes, early winter, Elaine Boc said.

"We leave our net up the year round and will play any time that the temperature is at least 45 [degrees]," she said.

And, she might have added, as long as there are no pterodactyls flying overhead.